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Message Text

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FM AMEMBASSY SAIGON
TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 6699

UNCLAS SECTION 1 OF 2 SAIGON 9202

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TAGS:
SUBJECT: HAMANITARIAN AID IN VIETNAM

REF: STATE 146922

1. MISSION PLANS TO FORWARD WITHIN TWO WEEKS A DETAILED RESPONSE TO TESTIMONY GIVEN BY ED BLOCK BEFORE THE HOUSE FOREIGN AFFAIRS COMMITTEE. FOLLOWING IS INTERIM REPLY.

2. THE POLITICAL PURPOSES OF MR. BLOCK'S STATEMENT EMERGE WITH STARK CLARITY ONLY IN THE LAST FEW PARAGRAPHS. "WITHOUT US RELIEF FUNDS" HE SAYS"... THE GVN WILL BE FORCED TO ALLOW THESE PEOPLE, MOST OF WHOM ARE FROM VILLAGES IN PRG CONTROLLED AREAS TO RETURN IF THEY CHOOSE TO THEIR ORIGINAL FARMS IN ACCORDANCE WITH THE PARIS AGREEMENT." THE PARIS AGREEMENT SAYS NOTHING ABOUT RETURNING TO ORIGINAL FARMS. RATHER IT MENTIONS FREEDOM OF MOVEMENT ANYWHERE, A FREEDOM WHICHIS DENIED BY NORTH VIETNAM AND ITS FRONT, THE SO-CALLED PRG, AND IT TALKS ABOUT A CEASE-FIRE WHICH IS CONSTANTLY VIOLATED BY NORTH VIETNAMESE TROOPS INCLUDING ARMED ATTACKS ON REFUGEE SETTLEMENTS, MORTAR ATTACKS ON SCHOOL YARDS AND TERRORIST ACTS AGAINST LOCAL OFFICIALS. THE POINT IS THAT AS ALWAYS IN VIETNAM SINCE 1954 HUNDREDS OF THOUSANDS, CUMULATIVELY MILLIONS, OF PEOPLE HAVE FLED FROM COMMUNIST AGGRESSION TO THE SOUTH. HARDLY EVER DOES ANYONE GO THE OTHER WAY. THE ASSERTION THAT IT IS SOUTH VIETNAM RATHER
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THAN NORTH VIETNAM WHICH DENIES PEOPLE THE RIGHT OF SELF-

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DETERMINATION IS AN UTTER AND TOTAL PERVERSION OF THE TRUTH.

3. THE CLAIM THAT SUCH PROGRAMS AS THE RECONSTRUCTION OF HIGHWAYS AND BRIDGES, THE BUILDING OF SCHOOLS AND WELLS AND THE RESETTLEMENT OF REFUGEES ARE IRRELEVANT SUGGESTS A CALLOUS DISREGARD FOR PEOPLE AND THEIR HUMAN NEEDS THAT IS AMAZING EVEN IN AN ARROGANT YOUNG MAN.

4. THE SUGGESTION THAT A MAJOR REDUCTION IN FOREIGN AID WOULD LIKELY FORCE PRESIDENT THIEU TO MAKE THE NECESSARY COMPROMISES IS STRAIGHT OUT OF THE BOOKS OF THOSE WHO TAKE THEIR CUE FROM THE PROPAGANDA LINE OF HANOI. IT PRECISELY FITS THE CURRENT HANOI STRATEGY WHICH HAVING RECOGNIZED THAT MILITARY VICTORY CANNOT BE ACHIEVED IN FACE OF THE DETERMINATION OF THE VIETNAMESE PEOPLE TO DEFEND THEMSELVES NOW ATTEMPTS TO CAPITALIZE ON ECONOMIC PROBLEMS IN ORDER TO ACHIEVE THAT VICTORY AND THEREFORE CONCENTRATES ITS ATTACK ON THE FOREIGN AND ESPECIALLY THE US ECONOMIC ASSISTANCE PROGRAMS.

5. AS TO THE ALLEGED DETAILS BUILDING UP TO THE POLITICAL CONCLUSIONS OF THE STATEMENT TWO IMMEDIATE IMPRESSIONS OF THE ED BLOCK TESTIMONY BEFORE THE HOUSE FOREIGN AFFAIRS COMMITTEE ARE: (A) MUCH OF THE MATERIAL PRESENTED IS NOW OUT-OF-DATE, AND (B) A GREAT DEAL OF THE TESIMONY CONSISTS OF MR. BLOCK'S PERSONAL OPINIONS OF WHAT SHOULD BE DONE OR SHOULD HAVE BEEN DONE IN AN IDEAL RESETTLEMENT PROGRAM UNDER IDEAL CIRCUMSTANCES WITHOUT REGARD TO THE FACT THAT CONTINUING NVA ATTACKS CONTINUE TO GENERATE NEW REFUGEES WHILE HARASSING GVN ATTEMPS TO DEAL WITH THE PROBLEM.

6. MANY OF THE CONDITIONS AND SITUATIONS OBSERVED BY MR. BLOCK HAVE LONG SINCE BEEN OVERTAKEN BY EVENTS. BOTH RETURN TO VILLAGE AND RESETTLEMENT PROGRAMS HAVE MOVED FAST. SINCE MR. BLOCK'S DEPARTURE FROM VIETNAM, FOR EXAMPLE, MORE THAN 300,000 ADDITIONAL PEOPLE HAVE RESETTLED (THE TERM "RESETTLED", BY THE WAY, HAS ALWAYS BEEN USED BY AID TO DESCRIBE MOVEMENT OF PEOPLE TO A RESETTLEMENT SITE, NOT FULL REHABILITATION AS CHARGED IN PARA 14.) SOME RESETTLEMENT AREAS WHICH APPARENTLY APPEARED TO HIM TO BE VIRTUALLY HOPELESS ARE BY NOW VIABLE, ON-GOING COMMUNITIES MAKING STEADY PROGRESS. DAY TO DAY ADVANCEMENT FOR A GROUP OF PEOPLE IS OFTEN DIFFICULT TO SEE AND SEEMS TO BE HAPPENING FAR TOO
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SLOWLY. HOWEVER, CHANGES OVER A LONGER PERIOD, UP TO A YEAR, CAN BE TRULY STARTLING. THE CONTRAST WAS VERY OBVIOUS TO THREE RECENT VISITORS:

A. W. D. ROSSITER, A STAFF MEMBER OF THE SENATE APPROPRIATIONS COMMITTEE CAME TO VIETNAM IN MARCH OF 1973 AND VISITED BIEN HOA'S AN LOI CAMP, WHICH IS INHABITED PRIMARILY BY MONTAGNARD REFUGEES FROM BINH LONG AND PHUOC LONG PROVINCES. HE FELT THAT CONDITIONS AT THE SITE AND OF THE PEOPLE WERE

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VERY POOR AND FORECAST A BLEAK FUTURE FOR THOSE MONTAGNARDS. ON HIS RETURN TRIP TO VIETNAM LAST WEEK, HE WENT TO A RESETTLEMENT SITE IN LAM DONG WHERE THOSE SAME PEOPLE ARE NOW LIVING. HE TOLD A NUMBER OF PERSONS THAT HE WAS AMAZED AND VERY, VERY PLEASED BY WHAT HE SAW. HE REPORTED THAT THE MONTAGNARD SETTLERS HAD THEIR OWN HOUSES; GARDENS WERE GROWING; LAND WAS CLEARED,ETC. YET THIS IS ONE OF THE SITES THAT MR. BLOCK CONDEMNS IN PARAS 15 AND 32.

B. TWO OTHER RECENT VISITORS, MR. WELLS KLEIN AND DR. DAVID FRENCH OF THE SENATE SUBCOMMITTEE ON REFUGEES,VISITED THE SUOI NGHE RESETTLEMENT SITE IN PHUOC TUY PROVINCE. MR. KLEIN HAD BEEN TO THE SITE IN APRIL 1973 AND REMARKED THAT HE COULD SEE A GREAT DEAL OF PROGRESS. BOTH WERE VERY IMPRESSED WITH THE CONDITIONS AT THE SITE AND THE PROSPERITY OF ITS INHABITANTS. MR. BLOCK HAS BEEN PREDICTING THE IMMINENT DEMISE OF SUOI NGHE FOR A LONG, LONG TIME AND HITS IT AGAIN IN PARAS 20 AND 21. IT JUST ISN'T TRUE. THINGS MAY NOT BE AS WONDERFUL IN SUOI NGHE AS MR. BLOCK WOULD HAVE THEM BE, BUT THE RESETTLERS ARE NOT DISCOURAGED; THEY ARE CONTINUING TO BUILD NEW LIVES FOR THEMSELVES IN THEIR OWN WAY AND CONTINUING WITH GVN ASSISTANCE, TO CLEAR THE THREE HECTARES OF LAND WHICH CAN BE CLAIMED UNDER THE LAND REFORM LAWS IN EFFECT (THREE HECTARES HAS PROVEN ACCEPTABLE TO MORE THAN A MILLION PARTICIPATION IN LTTT, CONTRARY TO THE CLAIMS OF THE "EXPERTS" REFERRED TO BY MR. BLOCK).

7. A FEW ADDITIONAL EXAMPLES OF DATED TESTIMONY ARE:
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A. THE PARA 7 COMMENT THAT SOME "180,000 REFUGEES ARE STILL UNNECESSARILY STAGNATING IN CAMPS". WEEKLY UNCLASSIFIED RELIEF AND REHABILITATION SITUATION REPORTS LISTING UP-TO-DATE CAMP POPULATION STATISTICS ARE TRANSMITTED BY THIS MISSION, RECEIVE WIDE DISTRIBUTION IN WASHINGTON, AND COULD BE EASILY CHECKED BY ANY INDIVIDUAL WHO WISHED TO PRESENT ACCURATE TESTIMONY. THE CLOSEST TOTAL TO THE BLOCK STATEMENT WAS 186,000 PEOPLE IN CAMP AS OF MARCH 29, 1974. TOTALS DROPPED STEADILY TO ABOUT 54,000 AS OF JUNE 29, THE LAST REPORT BEFORE THE BLOCK TESTIMONY.

B. PARA 19 STATES THAT "ALTHOUGH THE LDHB RESETTLEMENT PROGRAM IS OPERATING IN 23 PROVINCES IN SVN, AT LAST COUNT, FIELD REPRESENTATIVES FROM THAT OFFICE HAD BEEN ASSIGNED TO ONLY FOUR OF THESE PROVINCES. FURTHERMORE, DETAILED GUIDELINES IN RESETTLEMENT PLANNING AND OPERATIONS HAD NOT BEEN PREPARED." IN FEBRUARY 1974, THE MINISTRY OF SOCIAL WELFARE AND THE DIRECTORATE GENERAL FOR LAND DEVELOPMENT AND HAMLET BUILDING WERE JOINED UNDER THE LEADERSHIP OF DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER PHAN QUANG DAN, WHO HAS HEADED THE RESETTLEMENT PROGRAM SINCE 1971. AT THE PRESENT TIME, ABOUT 1,350 PEOPLE WORK DIRECTLY FOR MSW/LDHB IN THE FIELD WITH ANOTHER 600 IN SAIGON. IN ADDITION, AS MR. BLOCK IS WELL AWARE, THOUSANDS OF OTHER GVN OFFICIALS AND EMPLOYEES

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SPEND A GREAT DEAL, IF NOT MOST, OF THEIR TIME ON REFUGEE RELIEF AND RESETTLEMENT-RELATED ACTIVITIES.

8. MANY OF THE STATEMENTS MR. BLOCK MAKES ARE THE PERSONAL CRITICISMS BASED ON THE BELIEF THAT AN AMERICAN PHD IS QUALIFIED TO CRITICIZE PEOPLE WHO ARE NOT GOING WHERE HE WOULD HAVE THEM GO OR A PROGRAM THAT IS NOT MANAGED THE WAY HE WOULD HAVE IT MANAGED, OR MACHINERY OF RESETTLEMENT WHICH IS SURELY NOT MOVING AS SMOOTHLY AS IT SURELY WOULD IF HE WERE IN CHARGE, ETC. IT WOULD BE IDEAL TO PLACE PEOPLE ON ONLY THE VERY RICHEST SOIL; TO HAVE FULL ANALYSES OF THE SITE, HAVE THE LAND CLEARED AND PERHAPS EVEN COMPLETE PLOT AND HOMESITE DISTRIBUTION BEFORE THEY ARRIVE; TO TRANSPORT PEOPLE AT THE OPTIMUM TIME FOR PLANTING CROPS; TO BE ABSOLUTELY POSITIVE THAT THE SITE SELECTED WAS AT THE TIME AND FOREVER MORE WOULD BE SECURE; AND TO OTHERWISE HAVE A FULL RANGE OF SURE-FIRE CONTINGENCIES TO COVER EVERY POSSIBLE OCCURRENCE. SUCH PRECISION AND CARE MIGHT BE POSSIBLE IF THE GVN WERE ALLOWED TO FOCUS ON THE LEISURELY RESETTLEMENT OF SMALL NUMBERS OF PEOPLE. HOWEVER, HUNDREDS OF THOUSANDS OF PEOPLE ARE INVOLVED IN A HUGE UNDERTAKING. LAND AVAILABILITY PLUS

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THE DESIRE OF PEOPLE TO GET OUT OF CAMPS OR AWAY FROM DEADEND
LIVES IN THE CITY HAVE HAD TO TAKE PRECEDENCE OVER SCIENTIFIC
SOIL ANALYSES OR CITY PLANNING. MOST IDEAL WOULD BE TO HAVE
A TRUE CEASEFIRE AND PEACE IN WHICH PEOPLE ARE NO LONGER BEING
KILLED AND MAIMED BY NVA MINES, ROCKETS, MORTAR SHELLS, AND
BULLETS.

9. MR. BLOCK IS CORRECT THAT A NUMBER OF RESETTLEMENT SITES
HAVE FAREDPOORLY AND SINGLES OUT QUANG NGAI AS A PRIME EXAMPLE
(PARAS 14, 30 AND 31). WE WOULD AGREE. NOWHERE HAVE SITES
FACED MORE BRUTAL AND MORE CONTINUOUS ENEMY HARASSMENT THAN IN
QUANG NGAI. ONE SEEMINGLY OBVIOUS SOLUTION WOULD BE TO MOVE
THE PEOPLE TO OTHER AREAS OF THE COUNTRY WHERE THEY COULD START
OVER AGIN ON NEW LAND. SEVERAL THOUSAND QUANG NGAI WAR VICTIMS
HAVE ACCEPTED THE GVN OFFER TO RESETTLE IN MORE SECURE PROVINCES
FURTHER SOUTH. HOWEVER, MOST OF THE RESIDENTS OF QUANG NGAI.
TO REMAIN IN THE PROVINCE AND ON THE GVN SIDE. TO MAKE THEM GO
ELSEWHERE, EVEN FOR THEIR OWN GOOD, WOULD OBVIOUSLY FALL UNDER
THE CATEGORY OF "FORCED RESETTLEMENT" AND WOULD BE UNACCEPTABLE
TO THE PEOPLE OR THE GVN.ONCE AGAIN, IT SEEMS TOO MUCH TO ASK
THAT SOMEONE WHO TALKS ABOUT HOW TERRIBLE THE GVN IS TO ALLOW
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PEOPLE TO "RESETTLE OR RTV IN INSECURE AREAS" SHOULD MENTION WHAT
MADE THEM INSECURE OR WHO IS FIRING THE WEAPONS TO KILL DEFENSE-
LESS PEOPLE. LAUNCHING THE MORTARS AND FIREBOMBS TO
DESTROY THEIR HOMES, OR HARASSING THEM AS THEY TRY TO TILL THEIR
FIELDS.

10. ON THE ONE HAND MR. BLOCK CHASTISES THE GVN FOR NOT HAVING
COMPLETE, FOOLPROOF PLANS FOR EVERY SITE, WHILE ON THE OTHER
HE CONDEMNS THEM FOR "CONTINUING TO KEEP MORE THAN A HALF
MILLION REFUGEES IN CAMPS LONG AFTER THE CEASEFIRE AGREEMENT
HAD BEEN SIGNED." HE CAN'T HAVE IT BOTH WAYS. THE TRUTH IS THAT
A MASSIVE RETURN TO VILLAGE AND RESETTLEMENT PROGRAM BEGAN
SOON AFTER THE CEASEFIRE. SOME 675,000 PEOPLE WERE IN CAMPS AT
THE END OF 1972. THERE WERE 489,000 IN CAMP JUNE 30, 1973;
234,000 DECEMBER 31 OF THAT YEAR; AND BY-MID-1974, ONLY 54,000
REMAINED, HALF OF THEM CAMBODIANS WHO HAVE FLED THE CAMBODIAN
FIGHTING OF 1973/74. THE GVN TAKES GREAT PRIDE IN THAT ACCOM-
PLISHMENT, AS IT RIGHTFULLY SHOULD.

11. THE RESETTLEMENT PROGRAM IS FAR FROM PERFECT--NO ONE WOULD
DENY THAT. THE FACT HOWEVER IS THAT IT IS THE BEST POSSIBLE
OPPORTUNITY FOR HUNDREDS OF THOUSANDS OF REFUGEES AND UNEMPLOYED
CITY DWELLERS TO BE ABLE TO CREATE NEW LIVES FOR THEMSELVES.
THE GVN BELIEVES THIS. US OFFICIALS WORKING WITH THE PROGRAM IN
VIETNAM BELIEVE THIS. THE MANY VOLUNTARY AGENCY GROUPS, INTER-
NATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS AND OTHER COUNTRIES WHICH HAVE CONTRIBUTED
FUNDS AND MATERIALS TO HELP MAKE RESETTLEMENT A SUCCESS BELIEVE

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THIS. AND MOST IMPORTANT, THE REFUGEES AND OTHER DISADVANTAGED
PEOPLE WHO BENEFIT BELIEVE IT, AS EVIDENCED BY THE MANY, MANY
REQUESTS TO JOIN THE PROGRAM.

12. WITH CHARACTERISTIC ARROGANCE MR. BLOCK SAYS HE "SPEAKS
ON BEHALF OF THE REFUGEES" (PARA 3). HE WOULD HAVE A VERY
DIFFICULT TIME TRYING TO FIND A SIGNIFICANT NUMBER AMONG
THE MORE THAN THREE QUARTERS OF A MILLION WHO RESETTLED OR RETURNED
TO VILLAGE DURING THE PAST 18 MONTHS WHO WOULD AGREE WITH HIM
ON ANY OF HIS MAJOR CONTENTIONS INVOLVING THEM.
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